

Oppose H.B. 5204 –AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Ranking Members Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee, my name is Maria Weingarten. I am a realtor and I also serve as an alternate member of the New Canaan Board of Finance. I am here speaking as an individual citizen and I am opposed to HB5204, the Fair Share Plan.

There is an understood need for affordable housing at the lowest price point of the market. The thought is that housing can put people in proximity of opportunity: schools, jobs, public infrastructure. But how do we optimally enable access to opportunity? Members of the legislature proposing Fair Share and Monday's hearing on a transit-oriented development think there may be a problem in the housing market and the solution is that maybe we need to forget decades of zoning and land use laws, individual property rights, local public hearings on individual building projects and specific environmental and infrastructure constraints and throw that out the window and start fresh.

HB5204 seeks to bypass local planning and zoning authority to regulate land use in a "one size mandated to all approach." Only local planning and zoning and members of the local community through the use of public hearings can provide critical information necessary to properly evaluate building projects within their own municipality. Why? Because all land is finite and unique. Locally elected leaders and Planning and Zoning members are also most accountable to the residents of the municipality and can decide zoning issues in a manner that allows planned development without adverse impacts to the local infrastructure, the environment or historical preservation.

If housing is the solution, does it stand alone by itself or are there other elements that are necessary for success? If so, are there other things as well that need to be in place to optimally access opportunity: creating jobs, pathways to careers, schools, transit systems. If so, what is the best way to create that housing that leads to opportunity? That is the real discussion that needs to be had rather than just building housing arbitrarily through statewide mandates. The devil is in the details.

So what is wrong with the fair share bill?

- This year's Fair Share bill is too vague.
- It gives decision making power on 1) gross total affordable housing units needed in the state, 2) a gross allocation made to every region in CT and 3) then an actual fair share allocation to each individual municipality to unelected appointed bureaucrats and housing advocates. These decisions should be made through the legislature as they are accountable to our state's residents, as well as other important local municipal constituents, local P&Z experts, local land experts to ensure that allocations are appropriate based on the unique environment of each municipality.

- It eliminates consideration of market forces, like project viability and actual housing demand in different parts of the state. One can see from the most recent census that due to adverse economic factors in CT, population has declined in most of CT except Fairfield County, which benefits from access to the economic engine of New York City.
- It forces an arbitrary allocation of units to every municipality, decided solely by affordable housing advocates and planners on 4 very specific criteria: a town's grand list, household income difference, percentage of poverty and amount of existing multifamily housing. Three of those criteria are all closely related and these 4 factors do not consider the unique individual constraints that may exist within each municipality. Just because you build it does not mean they will come. If jobs and opportunity do not exist and if demand does not exist, is that an optimal location to build?
- The lines 126-130 of this bill recommend vague compliance and enforcement policies similar to what is used in other states. What other states specifically? New Jersey is one of the only states that has had a fair share system for decades and it has not made that state more diverse, and it has not made housing costs any lower.

Legislators, NGOs promoting fair share and the news media should openly disclose the amount of units that will be required on each municipality. Last year's worksheet from Open Communities Alliance should be made public and as residents might be shocked to learn the real facts and figures.

Based on last year's schedule, New Canaan will be required to develop 20% of its existing total housing stock, or 1,350 units. This is double what is required per 8-30g and some properties recognized under 8-30g will not be recognized under Fair Share, creating additional bureaucracy for every town in CT. Building this many units by requiring developers to include 15-20% affordable in a housing development would mean doubling our entire housing stock in New Canaan! This bill will essentially force all suburbs to double their current population and essentially become cities - the strain of these costs on local infrastructure would be crushing to most communities and increase local income taxes significantly.

Please stop treating the symptoms of why CT is unaffordable and seek public policy that will turn around CT's economy and encourage a more vibrant CT with better opportunities for all. Thank you very much for this opportunity to submit testimony. Please Vote NO on bill HB5204.

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